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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 002364

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#) [ZANU](#) [PF](#)

SUBJECT: RULING PARTY CIRCLES WAGONS AT ANNUAL CONFERENCE

REF: (A) HARARE 2359 (B) HARARE 2313

Classified By: Political Officer Win Dayton under section 1.5(b)(d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The ZANU-PF annual conference December 5-8 in Masvingo projected a ruling party united under the unquestioned leadership of Robert Mugabe and ever-resistant to outside influence. The conference ended suspense over succession speculation by indicating unambiguously that the party leadership would brook no further discussion of the matter. The party postured truculently toward the Commonwealth and the opposition MDC and reiterated the centrality of land reform to the party's platform. There was no apparent discussion of meaningful measures to address the country's economic implosion. Mugabe attacked those within the party who put money ahead of party interests and those who collaborated with the MDC, and took urban party structures to task for their failures. Perhaps foreshadowing a turbulent year ahead, the siege mentality deepened by this conference likely will further stifle debate within the party and harden the party against engagement with the opposition and the outside world. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Attended by two emboffs and representatives from more than a dozen diplomatic missions, the party's opening segment on December 5 revolved around land reform, party unity, and vilification of the Commonwealth. Disorganization was fairly evident, as some of the more than two thousand official delegates had to sleep in cars or on the grass during the first night. Anti-Commonwealth placards outnumbered the land reform signs that traditionally have dominated party gatherings in recent years, and groups outside the tented venue vented anti-Commonwealth and anti-MDC slogans.

3. (SBU) Mugabe delivered an energetic address and, flanked closely by two bodyguards, appeared to be in good health throughout the first morning's proceedings. Mugabe went after the Commonwealth, the MDC, and "enemies within the party" in his speech. Foreshadowing the government's subsequent withdrawal from the club, Mugabe questioned Zimbabwe's need for Commonwealth membership to wide applause. He continued his racially polarizing attacks against the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. He sounded an ominous warning to the opposition party, noting that the ruling party could "unleash legal force and legal violence" to counter its violations of law.

4. (SBU) Mugabe was pointed in his criticism of those within the party who strayed from strict party discipline. In particular, he singled out "money-lovers" who put self-interest over the needs of the party, "double-dippers" who consorted secretly with the MDC, and party structures in urban areas that had failed in contests against the MDC. Mugabe said nothing about talks with the opposition, other than to observe that they were not the business of the Commonwealth or anybody outside Zimbabwe. Singled out for recognition was the party's information and publicity effort (headed by party hard-liner Jonathan Moyo).

5. (SBU) On land reform, Mugabe acknowledged implementation problems. He complained that the A-2 program was lagging and that too much land remained underutilized. Competing claims continued to hamper administration, in part because former commercial farmers were paying urban residents to squat on and compete for recently resettled land. The government needed to exert more control over agricultural inputs. Finally, Mugabe cautioned members that not everybody needed land; there were not enough farms to go around and many would have to find prosperity down other avenues. Nonetheless, the redistribution of land to indigenous Zimbabweans represented a triumph for all. Among other issues addressed were HIV/AIDS and the deterioration of health services, which Mugabe emphasized required the party's attention. Embassy will relay a copy of the speech to AF/S if one is obtained. (Note: unlike his government addresses, the President's party addresses often are not circulated publicly. End note.)

6. (SBU) Other speakers at the opening session included Party Chairman John Nkomo, Vice President Joseph Msika, Party Secretary for Administration (and Speaker of the Parliament)

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Emmerson Mnangagwa, Masvingo Governor Josayah Hungwe and new Masvingo Party Chairman Daniel Shumba. A minister who offered the session's opening blessing set the tone for the

day, asserting that ZANU-PF was the arm of God driving the devil from Zimbabwe. Shumba received the most applause, although he received adverse publicity for presumptuously declaring he would be the party's next candidate for Masvingo central district (now occupied by an MDC MP), an apparent breach of party protocol without appropriate consultations. Mnangagwa, the relatively unpopular figure still regarded in succession speculation as having the inside track, got the most tepid reception. The heaviest applause fell upon a primary school student who recited a fifteen minute "poem he had written," complete with anti-neocolonial and anti-MDC diatribes. No speaker varied at all from the parameters of the President's address -- all speakers denounced the Commonwealth and tied future party success to the party's ability to follow Robert Mugabe. Indeed, Mugabe and the late Vice-President Simon Muzenda were the only party figures whose accomplishments were recognized throughout the morning.

17. (U) According to reports by the government-controlled "Herald" on the conference's closed sessions, Mugabe told the conference that he was not prepared to take a "rest" yet. He said he would "come back to you honorably and say I need a rest" when the time came, but until then members should not discuss succession clandestinely. Vice-President Msika went further and branded as a sellout anybody who would discuss succession while Mugabe remained in office.

COMMENT

18. (C) Squelching any discussion of succession will douse the overt aspirations and posturing among pretenders to the throne, such as Mnangagwa (ref A). The subject of adverse publicity in connection with a local gold scandal, Mnangagwa may be the conference's biggest loser, at least at first blush. The succession issue cannot help but remain a party concern beneath the surface, however, even as those beneath Mugabe continue to vie for his favor and economic privilege. The conference's biggest winners probably were the party's political hard-line wing, whose influence permeated the themes of every speaker. Also pleased will be those party elites who are exploiting the status quo to build economic empires above the law. Looking ahead, the theme of "enemies within" will open opportunities for Mugabe to readjust the party leadership more to his liking and for party members to go after each other on a host of personally based motives. The environment may set the stage for considerable intra-party political and economic blood-letting and possible witch-hunts.

19. (C) Closure on succession (for now) and the absence of any outreach to the opposition will further impel the MDC to plan mass action in the coming months (ref B). Perhaps foreshadowing and intending to justify such action, a December 5 missive "to the people of Zimbabwe" from MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai (e-mailed to AF/S) recounts the failure of good faith efforts by the MDC, the bishops, and the Presidents of South Africa and Malawi to engineer any meaningful dialogue in Zimbabwe.

110. (C) The conference also must have proven a disappointment to South African President Mbeki. Despite Mbeki's reported lobbying at the Commonwealth for Zimbabwe's readmission, Mugabe gave him little, if anything, in return. The consistent line throughout the conference reconfirmed that there appears little substance to underpin Mbeki's assertions of progress in political dialogue here. Furthermore, the conference's outcome underscores the ruling party's imperviousness to international pressure and the primacy of short-term domestic politicking over long-term national interest in the party's thinking.

111. (C) The conference reflected and will magnify one of the party's most significant flaws: its inability to encourage or even to tolerate debate within its ranks. A disaffected party member once close to Mugabe observed recently to the Ambassador that Mugabe was a changed man -- he used to welcome intellectual discussion and debate but had now cut himself off from all save those who agreed with him. Accordingly, we do not expect the party's approach (or lack thereof) to the country's political stalemate or ongoing economic collapse to change in the foreseeable future.

SULLIVAN